

Vet's Corner – Foot Injuries in Greyhounds

Foot injuries are one of the most common causes of lameness in dogs. These conditions are mostly traumatic and often acute, however some develop slowly. In many instances the owners may actually see what happens; dogs may yelp at the time of the injury but in other cases, because the dog is excited and active, they may not show the effects until later once they have cooled off. The same applies to a wide range of injuries, but foot injuries often will be quite obvious the next day.

Foot lameness can be caused by a range of conditions. I will discuss several of these:

Nail Injuries

Dogs with injured or damaged nails may exhibit any of the following symptoms:

- Limping is very common
- Bleeding or discharge from site of injury (nail bed)
- A damaged or crooked nail may be noted
- Affected foot may be sensitive and dogs often resent the foot being handled
- Dogs often lick the toe
- Toe may be swollen.

Causes

Any dog can injure a nail; however there can be a number of predisposing factors:

- Overgrown nails are more likely to snag or rip
- Dogs with metabolic or glandular conditions may lead to brittle nails e.g. thyroid
- Some animals have brittle nails throughout their lives
- Chronic nail bed infections with bacteria or fungus can also be a problem.

Keeping nails trimmed is the main treatment. Toenails will wear when a dog is constantly on hard surfaces (concrete or tarseal) but dogs on soft ground and grass will grow long nails quite quickly and these will catch and tear.

Racing greyhounds will have their nails checked frequently and with exercise and racing will wear naturally. Dew claws (inside toe) often are a problem because the nail doesn't wear down and is often overgrown and sharp. This needs regular trimming to prevent snagging.

Diagnosis

Often diagnosis can be quite simple based on a close inspection of the foot, but due to pain may need sedation or local anaesthetic to deal with it as injured nails are painful and can often become infected. Your vet will trim the nail back to its growing point, then bandage for several days to keep it protected and clean. Infection can be controlled with antibiotics and pain relief will most likely be provided.



Foot Pad Injuries

Cuts and abrasions are also quite common due to sharp object injuries. Mostly these need to be treated topically and dressed to prevent infection. A cut in the pad can be sutured providing it is fresh and clean. Wounds need to be flushed out thoroughly with saline and all debris removed before any suturing. A protective bandage and boot is useful to keep the wound clean and dry.

Regular bandage changes may be necessary before the wound can be left un-covered.

Often your vet will suggest or provide a plastic bag to protect the bandage from wet ground. Don't leave this bag on for any length of time or the foot will sweat and the wound will become moist and not heal.

Corns

These are a significant problem with greyhounds and very rarely seen in other dog breeds. A corn is very painful and quite difficult to treat. The corn is a hard circular keratin lump seen most commonly on the pads of the main central weight-bearing toes. You can liken a corn to having a small stone inside your shoe that you can't remove and need to keep walking on (it's very painful).

Discussion around causes centre on viral or mechanical aetiology. Because it seems to occur in only one dog in multi-dog households, it would suggest that the cause may not be infectious. Corns occur in the central weight-bearing toes in the front centre of the pad directly under the end of P2 (the second toe bone). It is suggested that lack of padding (fat) between the bone and the skin results in a callus (thickening of skin) forming and this becomes a hardened lump of keratin and acts as the stone in the shoe.

These dogs are very much more comfortable on soft ground but become acutely lame on a hard surface.

Suggestions

Don't walk your dog on hard ground or concrete, use a padded boot to protect the foot from hard surfaces when walking.

Treatment of Corns

There have been numerous methods applied to treating corns – some centring on surgical curetting (cutting out), others using corn pads similar to humans to soften the corn and allow scraping out on a regular basis. There has been a trial of injecting silicone in the area between pad, skin and bone. The jury is out on this. I think that in most cases of corns, treatment may improve but not cure. ■

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